

Human Rights for All
Message from U.S. Ambassador Shari Villarosa on the Occasion of the
International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO)
May 17, 2014

In his second inaugural address, President Obama declared, “The most evident of truths – that all of us are created equal – is the star that guides us still...Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like anyone else under the law for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well.”

President Obama’s remarks highlight the fact that many individuals around the globe still lack the basic human rights we all proclaim to stand behind. These individuals still suffer discrimination, intimidation, and in some places, fear for their lives because of who they are, and who they love.

I am referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals, who, throughout the world, endure abuse, violence, and exclusion, including in my own country. The roots of this run deep, founded in personal, cultural, and religious beliefs. The challenge to each of us is to recognize that all human beings, no matter their gender, religion, race, ethnicity, disability, or sexual orientation, are entitled to dignity, respect, and the right to live a life free from fear.

These days, the conversation hinges on LGBT rights. But many years ago, we in the United States had a similar discussion over the rights of our African American compatriots, who were discriminated against because of the color of their skin. In many parts of the United States at that time, they were not equal in the eyes of the law. Fifty years ago, we changed that, passing the Civil Rights Act to ensure all people enjoy equal rights protected by law.

I strongly believe that this demonstrates how deeply held societal beliefs can evolve. Over the years, we have seen people around the world join in the fight for rights not only for racial minorities, but for women, children, the disabled and other minorities. For many years the majority gave little thought to these issues at all. Fortunately we can always evolve. As former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton once said, “Those who advocate for expanding the circle of human rights were and are on the right side of history...” We all need to be on the “right side of history” again, by acknowledging that LGBT individuals deserve no less dignity than that enjoyed by their fellow human beings.

We know, too, that attitudes in Mauritius have changed over the years. I am certain it would be difficult today to find a Mauritian who advocates for the return of slavery, abolished in 1835. Once it was widely accepted. Today abhorrence of slavery is a deeply held belief around the world.

So too, must governments around the world do their part to protect their LGBT citizens and prevent the rise of homophobic acts in their countries. The legal framework must exist to prevent such acts, and it must be enforceable. The Government of Mauritius has instituted progressive laws and organizations to guarantee the rights of vulnerable persons. We commend the work of the Equal Opportunities Commission, which ensures that no person shall be placed or shall find himself or herself at a disadvantage by reason of his or her status, including sexual orientation.

The protection of universal human rights is central to U.S. diplomacy, and we are proud to be a leader in advancing human rights for all, including LGBT individuals. To quote U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, “Human rights and fundamental freedoms belong to all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity.”

On May 17, we mark the International Day against Homophobia and Transphobia (IDAHO), which was selected to mark the 24th anniversary of the World Health Organization’s removal of homosexuality from the international classification of diseases. We use this occasion to stand together, as LGBT individuals and LGBT allies, to proclaim the right of LGBT individuals to dignity and respect, to reinforce our support for LGBT individuals suffering from discrimination and abuse, and to call on everyone to join us in supporting our fellow brothers and sisters in the LGBT community.

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